

Transport for the People

**Proposals
for the
Post-War
Organisation
of British
Transport
Services**

**Issued by the
Communist
Party**

for Discussion

6d.

FOREWORD

*"To-day, more than ever, transport by land and sea has become a fighting arm. Transport forms the very blood-stream of civilian production and of the nation's social life"—
Mr. Noel Baker, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of War Transport, House of Commons, 5th May, 1944.*

THE Communist Party, in making its contribution to the widespread discussion now proceeding on the re-organisation of the transport industry, wishes first and foremost to pay its tribute to the men and women who, by land and sea, have played a part in the war no less vital and frequently not less heroic than that of the men and women in the forces.

THE Allied armies, supported by the Navy and the R.A.F., are to-day smashing their way forward into "Fortress Europe"; they are showing the world that our forces can defeat those of Hitler. The three-fold assault—in France, Italy and on the Eastern Front—has brought the guarantee of victory, but there can be no relaxation of effort until that victory has been won.

THE invasion of Europe demanded unparalleled efforts from merchant seamen and dockers, from railway workers and lorry drivers. Their efforts and their fortitude ensured that the ships were loaded and the men and supplies transported, that the wheels kept turning on railways and roads, and that the whole invasion proceeded according to plan. The work of the railwaymen and the busmen has made possible the rapid evacuation of London children from the danger area. Dockers, railwaymen and transport workers in London and Southern England have continued their work, unable to enjoy the protection from flying bombs afforded by warnings and spotters to workers in factory and office, with the matter-of-course disregard of personal safety of the soldier under fire who needs must carry on the fight.

THEY will continue to work tirelessly and unflinchingly in support of our fighting forces, since not until the final victory over Fascism has been won can they gain respite from danger or relief from excessive toil.

THE people of Britain can discharge their debt to these men and women by backing the efforts they are making to ensure that after the war they can keep the wheels turning in the interests of the whole community rather than for the profits of private enterprise, as public servants in a great co-ordinated national transport system which can guarantee them well-being and security commensurate with the services they render.

Transport for the People

*Proposals for post-war policy
issued by the Communist Party*
FOR DISCUSSION

TRANSPORT services affect the whole people. Whether travelling facilities are good or bad, cheap or dear, crowded or comfortable, makes almost as much difference to the health and well-being of the ordinary worker as the conditions under which he works. In London the average family in 1938 spent £15 a year on fares alone. Transport of goods is just as important in the economic life of the country as transport of people. It has been reckoned that 10% of the export selling price of coal, and 30% of the price of pig-iron was for railway freights. In peace time, inland transport employed over a million workers.

Thus the quality and cost of service provided both for passengers and goods, and the wages and conditions of employment of transport workers, between them have a tremendous influence upon health and living standards, upon the siting of industry, and upon the general efficiency of production.

If Britain is to be prosperous and happy after the war, with industry fully employed and with plenty of opportunities for leisure and enjoyment for the people, there will be great demands on the transport services. The reconstruction of the bombed areas and the fulfilment of a great housing plan, the relief and rehabilitation of Europe and the U.S.S.R., will mean heavy calls on the supply lines. It has been calculated that at the end of the war our national output can be 25 - 50% above pre-war, with all that that means in transport needs. Holidays with pay for all will mean increases in passenger traffic. At the same time transport will have to be so organised as to play its full part in national planning, especially in the

rehabilitation of the former Distressed Areas and in securing a better distribution of industry and population throughout the country.

At present our transport services are so organised as to form a heavy drag on national prosperity. In spite of the technical excellence of British railway and motor engineers, and the skill of our workers, we have one of the dearest, and certainly not one of the fastest, transport systems in the world, while the conditions of transport workers are in many respects the most backward in British industry. Over a hundred years of transport development in the interests of private profit, the growth both of monopoly and of chaotic and cut-throat competition, have given us in railways, road and shipping a jungle of powerful and conflicting vested interests, a shameful waste of labour, and standards of comfort and convenience which are worse than obsolete.

The transformation of the transport services, therefore, is one of the highest priorities for the post-war development of Britain.

WAR TIME CONTROLS

The war has brought for the first time a considerable degree of Government control of all forms of transport, for the simple reason that, as Mr. Noel Baker put it: "adequate transport is the very foundation of a successful war." The objects of this control have been limited.

- (i) Since oil and rubber have to be imported, economies in fuel and tyres have been enforced as far as possible.
- (ii) Since, also, thousands of transport workers have been called up, and repairs and renewals of vehicles have been cut down, it has been essential to make the best possible use of each form of transport.

The forms of Government control vary. The railways and long-distance "A" and "B" licensed¹ road haulage vehicles have been hired by the Government, but management remains in the hands of the old owners (the Railway Executive Committee in the one case, and Road Haulage firms in the other). In the case of canals and ports, on the other hand, the

¹ All road haulage vehicles have been licensed since 1933. The "A" licence is for public carriers, the "B" licence for traders carrying their own goods who wish also to ply for hire, and the "C" licence for traders carrying their own goods exclusively.

Government has taken over some responsibility for administration, though it has not hired them. Short-distance road haulage and road passenger transport are affected mainly by the negative control of fuel rationing, while coastal tramps operate under a system of permits for each voyage. The Government has also laid down the principle that no traffic should be carried by road which can travel by rail; it has reduced the volume of traffic by the zoning of certain products; it has secured some pooling of delivery services, and it has, of course, itself allocated all Government traffic—a very big part of the whole.

As a result of this control, incomplete though it is, certain definite successes have been achieved—the saving of mileage on non-essential journeys, the carrying of the tremendously increased war load of traffic by fewer workers¹—successes in which the great efforts of the transport workers themselves have played no small part. Some progress has been made in securing the better use of each form of transport. The four main-line railway companies now work as a team; railway wagons, including the 600,000 privately owned, have been pooled, and while engines have not been pooled, they are commonly lent by one company to another, as are also skilled staff. Competitive routes have been cut out, and all traffic now goes by the most speedy route. Tests by the Ministry have shown that—in spite of the critics of the Road Haulage Scheme—loaded running of road vehicles has averaged 81%.

War-time control has also resulted in some important advantages for transport workers in certain sections. The dockers' guaranteed week is perhaps the biggest of such gains, and a very real one. The merchant seamen also have gained a guaranteed wage. For the first time, national negotiations have taken place on behalf of the company busmen, and the national war wage secured by them is the same as that of the municipal and L.P.T.B. workers. There have also been improvements in welfare and canteen services for railwaymen and busmen alike.

But the partial control and co-ordination, which the Government found it essential to impose and the employers to accept, in order to prevent the whole national war effort being

¹ "By the end of 1943 the railways were carrying 1 million ton miles more freight traffic every hour of every day than they had been before the war." (Mr. Noel Baker, H. of C. 5.5.44).

hampered by chaos in this sphere, have not been able to eliminate all those defects in our transport system deriving from its unfortunate past.

While the war-time scheme has partially superseded the anarchic competition which helped to shape British transport before the war, it has NOT affected either the heavy burden of interest which has had such adverse results on pay and conditions, or the partial monopoly in various forms of transport and in transport as a whole which has existed side by side with competition and has given the public as raw a deal as the workers have had.

PRIVATE ENTERPRISE AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

How did the transport system serve the people prior to the war-time controls ?

Let us take the question of interest and profit first. One of the main reasons why the general level of wages has been so low and conditions on the whole so poor, in spite of all efforts made by the trade unions, is this heavy burden of interest and profit.

On the Railways

Rail wages have always been insufficient to maintain a proper standard of life. It was only in 1939 that the unions succeeded in establishing a 50/- minimum in London (47/- rural). Even to-day, with all the war increases won, the minimum is only 80/- in London (77/- rural). There are 100,000 railwaymen on these rates. Skilled rates bear no relation to the skilled rates in other industries, as can be seen from the gap between those of railway shopmen and those for similar classes of craftsmen in general engineering. Contrary to public belief, the vast majority of railwaymen do NOT receive a pension.

Working conditions on the railways would never be tolerated in an industry subject to Government inspection. But the railways do not come under the Factory Acts, and the companies have been able to leave many of their workers in old, dilapidated and dirty buildings, with washing and lavatory facilities that were out of date fifty years ago, with only a handful of canteens (189 before the war and 102 since, among 7,000 stations and some 600,000 railwaymen), and with practically no medical service.

Above all, the hunt for profit on an inflated capital has led to constant attempts to cut the total wages bill by declaring workers redundant. 150,000 railwaymen were sacked between 1921 and 1931 and for those left on the job there has been a heart-breaking blockage of promotion.

What about railway profits? The companies will never be satisfied until they earn the "standard revenue" of £51 million laid down for them in 1921. It was with this argument that they justified the cuts in wages in 1931. Yet their profits have not been small. In the twenty years 1923 - 1942 profits totalled £733,400,000, or more than the market value of the capital in 1941 and nearly three quarters of the nominal value, which is swollen by some £224 million of so-called assets which have no earning power at all. Although this averages over £36 million a year, the companies are far from satisfied. They claim that the 1921 "standard" shall still be taken as the measure of what they should earn both during and after the war. The more enlightened capitalist opinion argues that this is fantastic. As the *Economist* (18.3.44) puts it :—

"This figure is based on the results of a period now 31 years ago. It was held to be out of touch with existing conditions when it was invented over two decades ago. Since then there has been the whole development of road traffic, which has completely transformed the position of the railways."

Nevertheless, this demand for an increase over pre-war revenues, with all its fatal implications for railwaymen's standards, is being seriously pressed and has influential support.

In Passenger Transport

Conditions of passenger transport workers too are influenced by the burden of interest and profit on capital. What is notable here is the difference in pay and, even more, in conditions between the company and the municipal services. The fact that the L.P.T.B. workers have standards even more favourable than those of the municipal undertakings, in spite of the heavy and excessive interest burden with which the L.P.T.B. was saddled at birth, is due not only to their high degree of trade union organisation but to the very heavy traffic and high revenue in the metropolitan area.

How do wages compare on the various services? The top

rate of drivers in 1939 varied from 90/- (L.P.T.B. Central Bus) and 73/6 (Glasgow Bus) to 67/- (United Automobile Services) and 60/6 (Thames Valley Traction Co.) On some company undertakings it took six years to qualify even for such top rates as these latter ! It is a tribute to the strength and determination of the union that war increases now totalling 24/6 have been awarded nationally, and that women entrants into the industry have received the full rate for the job.

As to conditions, these too, especially in the all-important matter of compensation for split duties, and also as to canteens and welfare, are far the worst on the company undertakings—where the highest fares are charged. The municipal services are the only ones where any superannuation and sick pay schemes exist for the staffs.

What is the position with regard to profits? The big combines have seldom paid less than a 10% dividend, whereas the only interest burden on the municipal undertakings is the 3% or 4% interest payable on all municipal loans, although considerable revenue from many of them is applied for the relief of rates. As to the L.P.T.B., the terms on which the old owners were bought out were such that when the "C" stockholders in 1939 were pressing their claim for a rise in fares in order to give them their full 6%, it could be shown that already in 1938 they drew considerably *more* in interest than they were getting before the Board was set up¹. It is easy to see that there would have been no difficulty in giving London busmen a 7-hour day had the terms to the stockholders been less generous.

Competition and Monopoly

Next, let us examine the peculiar combination of competition and monopoly that exists. The whole history of British transport has been a history of fierce competition leading on to monopoly. The railways carried on a fierce struggle between themselves in the early stages. To-day, there is for most purposes one railway monopoly though, as we have

¹ "If the stocks of the acquired concerns had risen only as much as the Bankers' Magazine Index, the gain in market value would have been £13 million instead of £27 million" writes Mr. Ernest Davies. "So generous was the compensation given that the shareholders in the companies taken over received a free gift of £14 million."—*National Capitalism*, page 230. (Gollancz, 1939).

seen, some remaining competition between the four companies has had to be controlled during the war.

The canals offered effective competition to the railways and the railways strangled them. As early as 1906, a Royal Commission reported that the railways had "done much to drive trade off the canals, to destroy the revenue of canal companies and consequently to prevent improvements and the investment of new capital." To-day, the railways own 35% of canal mileage but carry only 12% of canal traffic.

Road vehicles began, in the years after the last war, to take passenger traffic from the railways. It was stated that between 1923 - 1926 the L.M.S. lost 15 million passengers and the L.N.E.R. 39 million. In 1928 the railways got power to operate road vehicles themselves and rapidly acquired very large holdings in the company undertakings (38.7% of the shares in the Tilling and B.E.T. Combines as early as 1934), as well as securing control of the biggest outside undertaking, Scottish Motor Traction.

Road Haulage

Only with road haulage had it proved impossible, up to the beginning of the war, for the railways to come to any arrangement. The reason is simple—the very large number of small owners in this industry. The 60,000 public carriers before the war owned an average of only $2\frac{1}{2}$ vehicles apiece. 51% of "A" licensees and 73% of "B" licensees, in 1938, owned only one vehicle each. Thousands of these men entered the industry after the last war, when lorries could be bought for a song from the Government Disposal Board, and most of these men have never been able to expand very much. There are, of course, a number of large firms. 20% of "A" licensees in 1936 owned 25 or more lorries each.

But even in this sphere the railway companies succeeded in securing control of Carter Paterson, Pickford's and Hay's Wharf Cartage Company, and evidence of their penetration of the road haulage industry is to be found elsewhere as well.

Road haulage has diverted from the railways, according to the estimate of Mr. Gilbert Walker (*Road and Rail*, 1942, p.123) about 50 million tons a year. The railways have sought to fight back at this road competition by offering 'exceptional rates' (rates below the standard, offered to attract some particular traffic). In 1935, 83.7% of all railway rates

were exceptional. They also, in their post-war programmes, demand the ending of the ban on undue preference which at present limits the use they can make of these rates, and the freeing of the railways from all standard charges and from declaring their rates. Further, they are planning to get a rates structure for road haulage agreed with themselves and enforceable on the small haulier.

What have been the results, first of competition and second of monopoly? The road-rail war has been disastrous for the planning of freight traffic, for the siting of British industry and for conditions, especially of haulage workers.

Freight traffic has not by any means been divided between rail and road according to what each is best suited to carry. Because the railways are bound by the statutory classification and standard charges, which are based mainly on the *value* of the goods, the roads have taken the more valuable, higher-rated merchandise. And because they are free to offer discounts they have taken the bigger loads and taken them often for the longer distances. Indeed, according to Mr. Gilbert Walker (*Road and Rail*, p. 109) "Some traders . . . consign traffic in bulk by road to a railhead and there give it to the railway for local distribution."

This is senseless. The railways, which have a track already laid down and suitable for heavy traffic were, before the war, not fully employed and were carrying a large proportion of smalls, while the roads were being cluttered with heavy lorries carrying chalk flints from Kent and Essex to the Potteries, or bricks which, if packed in containers, could very well be railborne.

The siting of a new factory is determined far more by the favourable terms offered by one railway as against another or by railways against roads than by any consideration of national interest. As the Barlow Committee pointed out; the "need for exceptional rates has tended to . . . attract new industries into the area round London" thus contributing to the "permanent congestion" in London—and, it might be added, to the continued distress of the Distressed Areas.

The cut-throat competition within the haulage industry has been largely responsible for the gypsy life led by commercial motor drivers. This life has been improved as a result of the efforts made by the Transport and General Workers' Union,

resulting first in the limitation of hours under the Road Traffic Act, 1930, and later in the enforcing of statutory wages and conditions by the Central Wages Board set up in 1939, following the Baillie Committee in 1938; but it still leaves much to be desired. Even to-day wages are low. Some typical rates are:

London.	Under 1 ton carrying capacity ..	79/-
	Over 5 tons	97/-
Grade 3 area.	Less than 30 cwt.	68/-
	Over 12 tons gross laden weight	85/-

There is still too much reliance on overtime, and the first strikes in the industry for many years were caused by the reduction of many men to basic rates when vehicles were laid up under the Road Haulage Scheme. Hours are long—even now often illegally long (12 hours' driving at night is common). Above all, conditions along the roads are a disgrace to any industry. The only eating and lodging places for most drivers are cafes which may or may not have food, where a bed has usually to be booked two or three trips in advance, and where in too many cases "the beds are so filthy that the men refuse to take the coverings off and they lie on the beds with their overalls on." (Mr. MacLaren in the recent House of Commons transport debate, 5.5.44.) Along most roads, it is impossible even to get a cup of tea between 2 p.m. Saturday and Monday morning, and the Transport and General Workers' Union has been pressing for a Trust, backed by Government, union, employers and any interested parties, to set up a chain of hotels for drivers and mates.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF MONOPOLY ?

In the main, high charges, under-development and a tendency, particularly on the railways, to technical backwardness.

Charges. It has long been a commonplace that charges on British railways are high. Mr. Colin Clark, in a book published in 1940 (*Conditions of Economic Progress* p.321) shows just how high. Real costs (i.e. excluding differences in wage rates) are 4 times as high in Britain as in the U.S.A., 20% higher than in Germany and nearly double those in Sweden. As he points out, "the inefficient, or only moderately efficient, systems of transport which prevail in certain countries have a depressing effect upon real national income." The level of passenger fares on the railways, as every worker

knows, makes it well nigh impossible for the average family to take its holiday very far from home.

Bus fares have been kept high to suit the railways. It is provided in the Road Traffic Act 1930 that the licensee may be required to fix fares so as "to prevent wasteful competition with alternative forms of transport"—that is, as the *Economist* commented at the time (10.5.30) "to put up his fares to such an extent as to drive people back to the trams or the railways." In 1936 the *Economist*, summing up the results of the Act, reported: "the railways have ceased to lose passenger traffic to public road transport." (16.5.36.)

Under-development. The railway companies, which built a jungle of competing lines in some areas such as Kent, Lanarkshire or the Spen Valley, have left others very much under-provided. The Labour Party report on West Cumberland, for instance, makes it clear that the lack of railway services was one big factor in keeping this a distressed area.

There are still many country districts which had, even in peace time, bus services only on certain days of the week. The big towns are well served, on the whole, by municipal services (of 50 towns with over 80,000 inhabitants, all but half a dozen have municipal services). But these are not allowed to expand. The inter-urban services are mainly company-operated, and the services for the agricultural districts, where traffic has been lighter—partly because the long hours and low pay of agricultural workers have discouraged travel—have been left entirely to company concerns, mainly to the small operators. (Although 37,000 out of the total of 53,000 buses and coaches belong to the larger undertakings, 4,537 out of 4,798 operators have 14 or less vehicles each, and no less than 1,846 have only one.) "It is usual," says an article in *Modern Transport* on 4.3.33, "to leave development of thinly-populated territory to smaller operators who may be able to combine market-day facilities with some other business."

Country districts have also been largely neglected by haulage firms. The need of transport in these areas has been recognised to some extent by the institution of a special 'Agricultural C' licence, which allows a farmer to carry his neighbour's goods. Any expansion of the haulage industry, which might have helped the agricultural areas, has been stopped by the railway companies' opposition to the issue of any new licences—an opposition which was described in a

pamphlet issued by a number of men prominent in the haulage industry (*The Road Carrying Industry and the Future*, p. 16) as "competition intensified to the pitch of a war of attrition." And because of the uncertainty and lack of organisation of the traffic, big and small hauliers alike have stuck to the routes with the best hope of a return load. As it is, the small haulier is often in difficulty over a back load—he usually has either to accept whatever traffic offers, often at cut rates, or to go to one of the privately-owned clearing houses, paying a high commission.

Technical backwardness. The railway companies, possibly with an eye to their post-war fate, are putting out a spate of propaganda about their technical progressiveness. "An energetic, efficient and superbly maintained transport weapon" was how the L.N.E.R. Chairman described the railways at the 'birthday' celebrations last December. *British Railways in Peace and War* (issued by the Railway Press Office) makes a number of fine-sounding claims: "Over 45,000 high capacity vehicles, capable of taking loads of 20 tons or more, were in service in 1938... By 1938 track maintenance had indeed become a more exact science than ever before... Many locomotive depots and layouts were completely modernised and new equipment... was installed." (pp. 10 - 11) Yet it is now well known to every railwayman and to many engineers outside the railways that, for instance, precisely the small size of the vast majority of the 1,200,000 British wagons (12 tons average as compared with 20, 40 and even 60 tons in other countries) is one main cause of both the slowness and the high cost of freight transport in this country; that permanentwaymen are working with tools of old and clumsy design and, like goods sorters, are lifting heavy weights by hand; and that the layout and equipment of most loco depots is out of date compared with any modern factory.

As to electrification, the companies claim only that they are "considering what additional lines should be electrified" (*Ibid*, p. 68). The Weir Committee, already in 1931, reported in favour of general electrification. It would mean both faster and more frequent trains, it would decrease the congestion in marshalling yards and it would free land round the main line termini for building by making it possible to put all lines leading into these stations underground. It would not, as we shall show later, produce unemployment, and it would

benefit enormously the health and comfort of both railwaymen and workers living alongside the lines by abolishing smoke and decreasing noise.

Furthermore it would make possible cheap electricity for rural areas. Yet to-day there are only 966 out of 20,132 route miles electrified, and everyone knows that there is not the remotest prospect that the companies will carry out any general electrification—except on public money.

WHAT IS TO HAPPEN AFTER THE WAR ?

What is to be done about transport after the war? There is only one possible answer for all interested, not in the profits of the few, but in the well-being of the people. *All key forms of transport must come into public ownership.* This alone can make possible the real planning of transport as a whole in the public interest. This alone can reduce the burden of profit and interest sufficiently to give long-overdue improvements both in the services rendered to the community and in the wages and conditions of transport workers. This alone can give both the public and the transport workers an opportunity to influence the way in which transport shall be developed and run.

Lord Leathers, Ministry of War Transport, has stated:

“For the first time we have evidence of the benefits of a fully co-ordinated transport system, and I do not think that the industry would ever want to go back to the conditions prevailing before the war.”

The Minister's opinion may be correct, but what are the *expressed intentions* of the industry (if by this is meant the large capitalist interests that control it) ?

The capitalists to-day pay lip service to co-ordination of transport, but by this they mean co-ordination in *their* interests, co-ordination in the form of monopoly. It is true that there is every possibility of further railway amalgamations, into two or even a single company. If carried out by the companies this would mean rationalisation in the bad old sense, not rationalisation for the country's benefit.

The railway companies had practically succeeded before the war in foisting their “Square Deal” programme on the Government and on the people, and unless the people fight for an alternative plan there is every likelihood of its being passed into law. The “Square Deal” programme was

designed to enable the railways to eliminate all unwanted competition from road haulage. One glimpse of what a railway dictatorship would mean was given by the statement of the G.W.R. Chairman, at the recent General Meeting, that the proposed road bridge over the Severn, in spite of its undoubted economic importance to South Wales, would be offering *unfair* competition to the railway.

The plan for an agreed rates structure as between rail and road would also probably have been already enforced, had it not been for the war. The big hauliers would, of course, endeavour to make up for any concessions enforced by the railways by increasing their own profits at the expense of the small men. The pamphlet *The Road Carrying Industry and the Future* in fact proposes that after the war the small haulier should be given a short time in which either to increase his fleet or to link up with a big firm, and that failing this, he should be confined to quite short-distance work.

Clearly, even with a road-rail deal, monopoly would not be complete—there is a big battle brewing between rail and shipping interests for control over the air (at present, almost all internal air lines are railway-owned). But beyond the claim for monopoly profits, a claim is also being advanced for subsidies from public funds. The G.W.R. Chairman has suggested that the railway track should “be treated as part of the whole system of national highways,” while there have been other suggestions for subsidies to maintain obsolete lines of “strategic importance” or for heavier burdens to be placed on all road users so as to equalise costs.

There can be no doubt that the barrage of criticism of the Government’s road haulage scheme by the owners in that industry is mainly due to their objection to *any* control and to their desire to be free to grab all the traffic they can get.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY’S PROPOSALS

The Communist Party declares that there must be public ownership of all main forms of transport.

The forms and administration will vary. The railways, quite obviously, must be nationalised, with their ancillary services and works. So must all internal air lines, all docks, waterways and coastwise shipping. Such road haulage firms (Carter Paterson, etc.) as are already railway-owned, will remain part of the nationalised railway system, which will

include collection and delivery services by road throughout the country. All long-distance "A" licensed vehicles will be nationalised, so that we can get one unified national freight service.

Short-distance road haulage, however, could remain in private hands; it would in fact be greatly assisted by the establishment of a network of Government clearing houses to handle all goods traffic.

Municipal bus services will, of course, remain municipal property, but in order to get one national transport system, the state must buy up the private bus companies, and these services must be transferred to the control of the appropriate local authorities or Regional Joint Boards. Control by separate municipalities must be so operated as to avoid any artificial and uneconomic division between services. Efficient organisation can be achieved while retaining the maximum popular control. With the company services under public ownership, and pending the establishment of Regional Government Authorities, some system of Joint Boards, composed of representatives of municipalities and county councils, together with representatives of the transport trade unions, will probably provide the best form of administration for all but purely municipal services, working under the direction of the Regional Transport Authority.

Administration

As to administration, *the main essentials are that it should give us a unified transport system and that it should be democratic throughout.*

There should be a National Transport Authority, at the head of which would be the Minister of Transport. The national transport system should be administered by a full-time board of technical and administrative experts appointed by the Minister and subject to recall. It should include trade union representatives appointed from a panel nominated by the unions. The Board should have as its task the planning, development and administration of the transport system as a whole. It would be their responsibility, for instance, to consider and provide for the transport needs of neglected parts of the country, especially in the former distressed areas and the agricultural areas, and to encourage technical development in all parts of the system.

The Authority would be responsible to the Minister and through him to Parliament. It would present an annual report which would be subject to Parliamentary debate, and its activities would be open to Parliamentary question.

Second, there should be Regional and Area Boards of Administration, responsible for the co-ordination and management of the transport system as a whole in the localities. It is essential that these Boards should be responsive to the needs of both transport workers and transport users, and they should, therefore, while being appointed by the National Transport Authority, include members appointed from nominations made by the local authorities in the area and by the transport unions. There would, of course, be separate departments under the National Authority and the Regional and Area Boards *managing* the different sections of the transport system (railways, docks, road haulage and passenger services, etc.).

Third, the unions should be associated with the management at every level of the national transport system. Apart from their direct representatives on the Boards of Administration, they should have continuous contact with the management through Joint Committees on a national, regional, local and depot or garage basis. The union representatives should have access to the fullest information as to the workings of the system. They should be entitled to raise all questions affecting transport policy as a whole, including efficient working, workshop practice and discipline, welfare and canteen arrangements, training of young workers, etc.

How Would it Work ?

Railways. A nationalised railway service would be in every way the very opposite of the 'rationalised' service so dear to the companies. There would no longer be the 20-year-old drive to cut down the number of men employed and to make each man do more work. On the contrary, one of the first acts of the new administration would certainly be the institution of longer holidays and a 40-hour week. The forty-hour week alone would mean 100,000 more railwaymen. Along with this, obviously, would go improvements in wages.

The necessary modernisation of the railway system and the revision of the fares and rates system would also tend to increase traffic. It is true that electrification would reduce

the number of men needed to man each train, but it is also true both that the total electrification of British railways would *provide* a great deal of employment (the Weir Committee estimated 60,000 for 20 years), and that electrification itself increases traffic. This has been the universal experience abroad and is also borne out by the fact that the sale of workmen's and season tickets rose by 7.4% on the Southern Railway between 1928 and 1932 while it fell 17 - 20% on the other lines. Above all, as we have said, there is the possibility of an increase of 25 - 50% in national production after the war with the resultant increase in traffic. Even as it is, the railway companies are expecting to cash in on a boom in post-war holiday travel. With the removal of the dead hand of the railway stockholders which has helped to strangle industry, future prospects for the railways will become even better.

Nationalisation of the railways will not only mean security of employment and the opening of avenues of promotion. It will mean improvements in pay, canteens, decent working conditions; and it will also mean that railwaymen will for the first time get some say in the running of the industry. As Mr. A. G. Walkden, M.P. said in evidence before the Royal Commission on Transport in 1929 :

"... it would give a greater feeling of confidence and solidarity to the service if men who are driving the engines and running the trains, working the signals, shunting and so on, could feel that someone who had lived the kind of life they have to live was in the supreme administration of the business."

For the community, the most important results of nationalisation will be the possibility of lower charges, on the one hand; and, on the other, the possibility of enjoying better transport facilities, since the transport services will be planned as a whole and adapted to the siting of industry. Which branch of the transport system should carry any particular freight would be settled, not by competitive rates or by monopoly agreement, but by the technical suitability of the various methods. All long-distance freight would be allocated through Government clearing houses which would decide how goods should travel (except in such cases where the owner expressed a preference for which he was prepared to pay a

premium). It would be possible, by adjustments in rates, to give direct help in the biggest task of post-war Britain, the *rebuilding* of the former distressed areas.

Buses and Trams. Road passenger services are in the vast majority of cases short distance services, urban or inter-urban. The kind of service to be given is therefore chiefly a matter to be decided by the people in the areas concerned, though minimum wages and conditions in a publicly-owned service would be settled nationally. As with the railways, so with the buses—they will no longer be run to provide a maximum profit to the shareholders. High standards of public service, together with improved wages and conditions for the staffs, will be the principle consideration. The general introduction of the 40-hour 5-day week will certainly be one of the first acts of the new administration, and improved standards of welfare facilities will also be laid down nationally. The representation of transport workers and of local authorities on the Boards of Administration will probably lead to a better design of vehicles from the point of view of both the crews and the travelling public.

The present legal restrictions on municipal undertakings will cease to exist and expansion will be encouraged wherever desirable; and it will be possible to ensure that services are run as they are required—that, for instance, in London, services are not concentrated on the best-paying routes in the West End while suburban routes are starved. The people will be able to secure services to neighbouring beauty spots (instead of having to fight, as the Dagenham Council had to fight the L.P.T.B. for years for a service to Hainault Forest).

The old private company services would need a certain amount of regrouping since they have developed as a result of financial penetration and amalgamation, and not according to the needs of the neighbourhood. Inter-urban and municipal services alike would be brought within the framework of the national transport system. This would mean that minimum services and maximum fares were laid down and that all transport services were co-ordinated—e.g. terminals for cross-country buses could be relocated where necessary close to railway stations and combined or interchangeable rail and bus tickets could be issued.

Administration, apart from that of the purely municipal

undertakings, would be carried on by the representatives of the local authorities in the area concerned acting, with the addition of representatives of the transport trade unions, as a Regional Joint Board (pending the establishment of Regional Government Authorities). Long-distance road passenger services (inter-regional) would be owned and administered by the National Transport Authority.

Haulage. The anarchy in the haulage industry would be resolved in the only way possible and the industry would begin to play its full part in providing the services the country needs.

The long-distance work would become a public service, fully geared in with other long-distance carriers, the railways, waterways and coastwise shipping. In short-distance work we believe there is still a large and suitable field for the small man, who can perform valuable work in providing the flexible, readily available services that are needed, notably in rural areas, and in supplementing the railway collection and delivery services. His existence will be made more secure and the organisation of his work will be facilitated by the help of government-owned clearing houses. These, obviously, will be quite unlike the privately-owned clearing houses of to-day—they will not be there to make a profit out of the haulier, but to organise traffic and eliminate empty running.

“C” licence vehicles will not be nationalised (unless or until the firms owning them are nationalised), but “C” licensees should no longer be prevented from carrying goods for other traders as well, (in other words the “C” licence should be abolished and the “B” substituted for it) in order to facilitate pooling and thus reduce empty running. There might well be also, for a time, a certain amount of zoning of distribution such as exists to-day. There would need to be adequate control over this type of transport. All traders operating their own transport systems would have to present monthly returns to the Area Transport Board, including log-sheets and way-bills in respect of each vehicle, thus enabling the Board to ascertain the quantity and character of goods carried, whether on the firm’s own account or for hire.

Further, with the elimination of profit-seeking and the reduction in interest payments which will be achieved by the nationalisation of the long-distance services, with economies

that will arise from better organisation of the whole industry, with union representatives on the National and Regional Boards of the nationally-owned sector, and with joint consultative machinery throughout, it will be possible both to improve pay and conditions and to give scope to the initiative of the workers, among whom an interest in the general problems of the industry is already widespread.

The provision of road transport hotels must be a priority. Mr. MacLaren in his recent speech in Parliament, gave an outline of the plans drawn up by the architects he had consulted :

“Nothing was left out. There was a drive-in and drive-out, petrol supply, recreation rooms, cubicles and all the other things necessary to constitute a rest centre for men on the road.” He added that “these hotels would pay for themselves after they had been in use for three or four years, taking into account also the number of meals that would be served.” (*Hansard*, 5.5.44.)

The union doubtless has its own plans for the kind of accommodation needed, and in a nationalised industry there will be nothing to prevent these being carried out.

Haulage yards and garages will also need to be greatly improved. Nothing reveals more sharply the primitive state of this industry than the contrast between almost any haulage yard and any bus depot. These dirty inconvenient dumps must be cleaned up and made worthy of a civilised industry.

Improvements in the basic rates and hours of all haulage workers would also become possible, and it would be a condition of licence for *all* vehicles that wages and conditions were not less favourable than those in the publicly-owned section of the haulage industry.

Finally, there are considerable possibilities of technical advance, ranging from the design of lorries to new methods of transport. At present there is no one body with sufficient influence to be able to tell makers what sort of lorries and drivers' cabs are required. Haulage workers will certainly be able to make changes here, as well as being able to propose solutions for such problems as, for instance, the jammed stretch of road from Canning Town to Aldgate, where 1 - 1½ hours may frequently be taken on the 3 - 4 mile journey, and where perhaps some new method such as trolley-trains, using

the wires at night, or the use of underground electric traction is necessary to handle the heavy traffic now blocking the roads—much of it still horse-drawn.

COMPENSATION

The railway, bus and road haulage company shareholders and directors have drawn handsome profits over many years at the expense of every other industry, of the travelling public, and of their employees. Enormous sums of the people's money have poured down the drain of a wasteful and inefficient transport system. This must now be ended once and for all. But a proposal to dispossess the shareholders—with nothing but compassionate grants in hard cases—is one that could only be operated along with the transference of power into the hands of the working class.

Public ownership of the key sections of transport cannot wait until we have a socialist Britain. The whole purpose of this Memorandum is to establish the possibility and the necessity of securing a national publicly owned transport system immediately following the war, but this will necessitate the payment of some compensation to the displaced owners. The amount and method of that compensation are of importance. The experience of the L.P.T.B. has shown that it is possible to bring an undertaking into nominal "public ownership" while neither giving the public any control over the services nor relieving public and workers of any of the burden of interest and profit previously extorted from them.

Two things are essential in the public interest in any scheme for nationalisation of the transport services.

(1) The method of compensation must be such that the former owners are completely divorced from the nationalised undertaking. They must not be given seats on the new Boards of Management, and they must not be bought out with stock in the new transport system, but with general State Bonds, carrying a lower rate of interest than that which they now draw.

(2) The amount of compensation paid must allow of substantial surplus revenue being available to provide for improvements in pay and conditions for the staff and in services for the public. Some compensation must be paid, but the amount must not be based on the swollen profits resulting

from monopoly, from the excessive exploitation of the workers and from the overcharging of the public that have been the rule in transport. It would be idle to expect the necessary great improvements if the nationalised undertakings were committed to provide in perpetuity for the old owners as much as they are collecting in dividends and interest to-day.

TRANSPORT FOR THE PEOPLE

There are fine prospects in front of us. Transport *can*, even within a capitalist Britain, be made to work for the people and not for the monopolists. Transport workers can win something of the conditions and the place in the community that they seek.

There is no indication as yet that the Government is convinced of the need to nationalise the transport industry; the railway companies, the bus combines and the big hauliers certainly do not want it. But transport workers are used to fighting. The railwaymen's long struggle for a living wage, the busmen's fight for shorter hours, the lorry drivers' persistent fight for civilised conditions, and the great struggles waged by the dockers over the last 60 years, are part of working-class history. And transport workers have learnt something else in the course of these fights—they have learnt the value of unity. It was railwaymen and transport workers, together with miners, who formed the Triple Alliance after the last war. To-day things are even more hopeful. The three rail unions have reached a closer understanding than ever before. All the transport unions can work together inside Britain in the same way as within the International Transport Workers' Federation. And they can play a big part in that fight for working-class unity on the political field which is the key to the defeat of Toryism.

The public ownership of transport is part of the Labour Party's programme. The transport unions are one and all long-standing advocates of the principle, and many of them have worked out detailed proposals on the question. The Communist Party sees it as a measure that is necessary for the well-being and progress of the whole of the people as well as of the transport workers, and puts forward its point of view in this Memorandum as a contribution to the discussion on ways and means that is now interesting very wide sections of the community.

But let there be no mistake about it—public ownership of transport will demand the forging of a common front of all progressive forces against the Tories; it will demand the closest unity between all transport unions and it will demand a real campaign to get the public—who have so much to gain from it—into action to achieve it.

We have no time to lose. The fight for the future of transport is already on. The victory is well worth the winning. Transport owned and controlled by the people for the people has a vital part to play in the building of a Better Britain.

INVITATION

The publishers would welcome comments, suggestions and criticisms of the proposals put forward in this pamphlet. Please address letters and enquiries to the Communist Party, 16 King Street, London, W.C.2.

IN COURSE OF PREPARATION

Memoranda are being prepared on the Shipping and Docks Industries.